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THE CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA

CONCLUSIONS

The Roman Catholic Church has become one of the principal forces for change in Latin America, primarily as a result of the influence of foreign priests and modern European Catholic thought, social doctrines enunciated by the Popes, and the leadership of individual clerics and laymen. Progressive churchmen who advocate change are gaining national and international influence at the expense of the conservatives and reactionaries. This course appears to be irreversible.

The forces arrayed against the progressives and church-sponsored social reform, however, remain impressive. Of primary importance, of course, is the fact that the conservative establishments that control most of the countries are much stronger than the proponents of change. Moreover, progressives, because they do not make up the majority of the clergy and are not predominant in the church in most countries, have to sell their social reform doctrine to the conservatives before any really dramatic advances can be made. Progressives may well find their programs of social reform difficult to finance since conservatives in most countries are in a better position to influence distribution of resources traditionally available for church use. An added obstacle is the inertia and manana attitude toward change of Latin American society.

Note: This memorandum was prepared in response to NSSM-68 and was approved by the National Security Council's Interdepartmental Group for Inter-American Affairs on 9 October 1969. It was produced by the Office of Current Intelligence of the Central Intelligence Agency and coordinated within the Agency by the Clandestine Service and the Office of National Estimates. It was coordinated also with the Bureau of Intelligence and Research of the Department of State. Much of the information, especially in the country-by-country analysis, is based on reports provided by the US Country Teams.

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For the immediate future, therefore, although the impact of the new currents in the church will vary from country to country, few far-reaching reforms or dramatic results will be produced. Frustration over lack of progress, in fact, may lead progressive and radical churchmen into becoming an increasingly disruptive force both within the church and in Latin America in general. These clerics already view "foreign domination" as the principal barrier to economic development, and the US is likely to become a principal scapegoat for their frustrations. Some progressives and the majority of radicals may be driven into alignment with leftist political groups in attacking the establishment. Thus, especially during periods of governmental instability, the forces operating for social change may cause unrest and turmoil. The church may have a major role in the outcome.

Foreign priests are playing an influential role in the Latin American social reform movement. Comprising 40 to 50 percent of the total number of priests in Latin America, many of these foreign priests are in the vanguard for committing the church both to internal modernization and to societal reform. Some go so far as to call for violence to achieve these ends. Many others are conservatives, or, as foreigners, are reluctant to become involved. The importance of the foreign priests in the over-all Catholic church picture, however, is suggested by the fact that they are a majority in 14 of the 23 countries cited in this memorandum.

Protestants in Latin America, despite their small numbers when compared with the Catholic majority (a ratio of approximately one to 22), have

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enjoyed a tremendous increase in adherents in recent years. The Pentecostal sects have proliferated the most and now comprise over 60 percent of the total Protestant membership. Although Protestantism throughout the world is highly factionalized, the World Council of Churches has helped to moderate these differences in Latin America and has promoted cooperative missionary programs. Today, a number of ecumenically-minded Protestant churchmen are co-operating with one another and with progressive Roman Catholics in support of social reform programs.

Latin America's small Jewish community, on the other hand, has not engaged in many social reform efforts. It has concentrated primarily on attempts to integrate into the over-all Latin American scene without losing its religious identity.

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[Omitted here is the body of the paper, which is comprised of two sections, "Common Background," and "Catholic Unity in Latin America;" also omitted was a chart entitled "Religion in Latin America."]